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Children & Family Services Division Office of Child Abuse Prevention

SUPPORTING FATHER INVOLVEMENT

Research study determines effectiveness of active father involvement in family

Supporting Father Involvement (SFI) is an evidence-based research intervention conducted in Santa Cruz, San Luis Obispo, Contra Costa, Tulare and Yuba counties by the University of California Berkeley. Originally funded in 2002 by the California Department of Social Services' Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP), the five-county study was employed to: 1) determine the effectiveness increasing positive father involvement with their families, 2) reduce child abuse and neglect, and, 3) measure organizational culture change to determine if the family resource center implementing the intervention becomes more inclusive of fathers in other programs and services. County child welfare service agencies partner with family resource centers in each county to provide direct services to the community.

In the first phase of the study, low income families, with no open child protective services (CPS) case over the past year and with at least one child under 7 years of age, were eligible to participate in the study. Once accepted, families were randomly assigned to one of three categories: 1) one-time educational presentation on improved outcomes for children in families where fathers would take a positive, active role, 2) a 16-week (2 hrs. per week) fathers' group, or 3) a 16-week (2 hrs. per week) couples' group. All project participants received case management services.

Currently, SFI data is collected through family assessments administered three times during the families' participation. Results of the initial data analysis confirm:

- families and children are healthier when fathers are more involved with parenting and working with mothers as co-parents and partners
- parents experience reduced stress and anxiety; are more satisfied with their relationships
- children are less hyperactive and aggressive

Funding for the five counties has extended the intervention through 2012 to include families with open CPS cases of child abuse and neglect or domestic violence. Results of the first phase implementation are being disseminated statewide to California's providers and stakeholders. For further information, please visit the Supporting Father Involvement Web site at supportingfatherinvolvement.org/.